

The Symbolic Semantics of Justice: The Unity of Philosophical Images in Fine Art

Mansirova Shahana Zulfugar

Teacher at the Azerbaijan State Pedagogical College under the Azerbaijan State Pedagogical University Baku, Azerbaijan

Abstract

The article analyzes the role of symbolic images in fine arts as a means of expressing human social, moral, and philosophical thoughts, using a composition centered on the core idea of "Rays of Justice" as an example. The semantic meanings of symbols such as the sword (acting as the central axis), open book, scales, eye, sun, red flower, and human profiles, along with their interrelations within a unified philosophical-artistic system, are explored.

The study demonstrates that justice is presented not merely as a strict legal mechanism, but as a moral and ethical responsibility arising from the unity of knowledge, truth, conscience, objectivity, and mercy. It is substantiated how the vertical compositional structure, symmetrical balance, and color scheme formally complement the conceptual content of the work. Overall, the piece is interpreted as a visual moral model evaluating human and societal relationships on a philosophical plane.

KEYWORDS: fine art, symbolism, concept of justice, semantic analysis, philosophical-artistic text, compositional structure, moral balance, visual metaphor.

Introduction

In fine art, symbolic images serve as one of the key means of expressing human social, moral, and philosophical thoughts. Throughout the centuries, artists have not merely depicted visible reality; by endowing various objects and figures with additional meaning, they have expressed universal concepts such as justice, truth, freedom, love, struggle, life, and death. In this context, the presented artwork attracts attention as a composition that combines numerous symbolic images and explores human and societal relationships on a philosophical plane.

The main conceptual line of the work consists of the notion of justice, the preservation of truth, moral balance, and the inner world of the human being. Various symbols—such as a book, a sword, scales, an eye, human profiles, the sun, and a flower—are presented interconnectedly within the composition. Although each of these elements carries an individual semantic meaning, their combination within a unified composition further reinforces the central idea of the work. Every symbol depicted here, though appearing as an independent image at first glance, is actually an integral part of the overall conceptual system. In this regard, the artwork can be evaluated not merely as a depiction of individual objects, but as a unified philosophical-artistic text constructed through symbolic signs. Based on the general structure of the work, it can be said that justice is presented here not only as a legal and social concept, but also as a universal principle formed within the human moral world. The images of the "sword," "scales," and "book" placed at the center of the composition create the main ideological axis of the work. These three key elements symbolize the unity of the concepts of "truth," "law," and "justice." The book serves as a symbol of knowledge and truth, the sword of law and power, and the scales of objectivity and balance. The interaction of these elements within a single composition demonstrates that justice is tied not only to the law, but also to knowledge, thought, and moral responsibility.

The image of the book holds special significance in the semantic structure of the work. Depicted in an open state, the book primarily represents the concepts of knowledge, science, enlightenment, and truth. The open position of the book demonstrates that it is presented not as a secret or enclosed source of knowledge, but as an accessible source of truth and moral value for humanity. For justice to be established properly, it is essential for a person to comprehend events, understand cause and effect, and possess the ability to discern truth from falsehood. From this perspective, the book image constitutes the intellectual and moral foundation of justice within the composition. In other words, in the semantic system of the artwork, the starting point of justice is knowledge and truth. It is also no coincidence that the book enters into a visual relationship with the sword along the central axis. In a sense, a relationship of mutual complementarity emerges between these two symbols. The book expresses knowledge and truth, while the sword expresses the defense of this truth and the law. Here, it is possible to interpret the sword not merely as a weapon, but as the protective force of law and justice. If the sword is accepted as a symbol of physical force, the book positioned beside it indicates the direction in which this force should be utilized. Thus, the work is concerned not with force itself, but with the purpose that force serves. When law and force stray from knowledge and truth, the concept of justice risks losing its essence. Therefore, the combined depiction of the book and the sword expresses the interplay between knowledge and force, and between truth and law.

This evokes Mammed Said Ordubadi's historical novel *"The Sword and the Pen"* (*"Qılınc və qələm"*).

The sword placed at the center of the composition is one of the key elements of the artwork from both a formal and semantic perspective. Its vertical orientation creates a unified axis that connects all parts of the composition. The visual connection of the sword with the book at the top, the sun in the center, and the human profiles at the bottom links the various semantic layers of the work together. Thus, the sword functions not only as the central element of the composition, but also as a symbolic bridge connecting knowledge, truth, law, and humanity.

Another important feature of the sword motif is its association with the human hand. The human hand here symbolizes willpower, action, responsibility, and the capacity for decision-making. This detail further deepens the philosophical content of the work. For although law and justice exist as abstract concepts, their implementation depends on human will. In this sense, the artwork poses a fundamental question to the viewer: Who executes justice, and who is responsible for its preservation? According to the semantic structure of the composition, the answer lies within the human being itself. Consequently, humanity is presented in the work as both the subject of justice and the entity holding responsibility before it.

The motif of the scales in the artwork serves as one of the oldest and most universal symbols of the concept of justice. The primary function of scales is to weigh, compare, and establish balance. Therefore, their placement in the composition demonstrates that justice relies on the principles of objectivity and equality. The scales imply the evaluation of both sides without granting unjustified preference to either. In this regard, the scales in the work express not only legal justice, but also the principle of moral balance in human life.

The positioning of the scale pans on either side of the composition also reinforces the overall symmetrical structure of the work. Thus, a mutual harmony between form and content is established here. The visual balance inherent in the composition itself formally confirms the central idea of the work—the concept of justice and equality. In other words, the idea of justice

is expressed not only through the depicted symbols, but also through the compositional structure itself.

The eye motif placed on one of the scale pans brings an additional philosophical nuance to the semantic content of the artwork. The eye is traditionally associated with perception, observation, consciousness, knowledge, and truth. For justice to be carried out, one must first see and comprehend the truth. From this perspective, the eye image can express the idea of bearing witness to the truth, seeing what is concealed, and penetrating the essence of events. At the same time, the eye can be interpreted as a gaze directed toward the inner moral world of the human being. In this case, the eye transforms from an organ merely observing the external world into a symbol of an inward gaze turned toward one's own conscience and moral responsibility.

The red flower placed on the other scale pan creates an interesting semantic contrast with the eye motif. While the eye is mostly associated with observation, reason, and truth, the flower expresses the concepts of life, love, beauty, emotion, and mercy. The placement of these two images on opposite scale pans raises the problem of balance between reason and emotion, objectivity and mercy, and law and humanity within the artwork. Here, justice is presented not merely as a rigid and cold legal mechanism, but as a humanistic principle that accounts for the human element.

In this regard, one of the vital philosophical messages of the work can be formulated as follows: "True justice requires the involvement of both the mind and the human heart." A decision based solely on emotions may lose its objectivity, whereas an approach based strictly on cold law may weaken its humanistic essence. The mutual relationship between the eye and flower motifs in the work precisely emphasizes the necessity of harmony between these two principles.

The sun motif, which occupies a prominent place in the composition, further expands the conceptual and thematic weight of the artwork. Across various cultures, the sun has been accepted as a symbol of life, light, truth, energy, and spiritual awakening. In the presented work, the placement of the sun in a golden-yellow hue at the central section turns it into one of the main emotional centers of the composition. The rays radiating from the sun seem to illuminate the entire composition, presenting the concept of justice as a transition from darkness to light.

From this perspective, the sun motif can symbolize the unveiling of truth and the establishment of justice. The confrontation between darkness and light here carries a metaphorical nature: darkness signifies ignorance, injustice, and moral blindness, while light expresses knowledge, truth, and justice. The placement of the sun behind the sword also creates an intriguing semantic connection. This suggests the idea that the power underlying law and justice must be guided by truth and spiritual light.

The two human profiles located at the bottom of the artwork connect the philosophical content of the composition with the human element. These profiles are positioned face to face with the central sword placed between them. The mutual positioning of the human profiles can be interpreted as a dialogue, a confrontation, or an encounter between two different worldviews. Simultaneously, they can symbolize two distinct facets of the human inner world—reason and emotion, good and evil, as well as individual and social principles.

The sword situated between the human profiles acts as both a boundary and a balancing element between these two sides. In this sense, the position of the sword demonstrates that law and justice serve as essential regulatory forces for resolving contradictions arising within human relations and society. However, the depiction of the sword alongside the book, scales, and sun

indicates that this regulation must rely not solely on physical force, but on knowledge, objectivity, and moral responsibility.

Thus, the human profiles in the work function not merely as portrait elements, but as a generalized image of humanity. Rather than representing individual personalities, they act as symbolic figures depicting the various facets of society. From this standpoint, the main idea of the work addresses human and societal relationships. Justice in society becomes possible not merely through the existence of laws, but when individuals embrace the principle of justice within their own behavior and thinking.

The interaction of all these symbols forms a unified semantic system of the work. The book represents knowledge and truth, the eye represents seeing and perceiving the truth, the sun spiritual light and hope, the sword law and responsibility, the scales justice and balance, and the flower humanity, compassion, and life. None of these symbols should be considered in isolation from the others; their primary meaning emerges precisely from their interaction within the composition.

From this perspective, the semantic structure of the work can be conditionally expressed as: "Knowledge leads to truth, truth to law, law to justice, and justice to spiritual balance." However, man stands at the center of this process. Man is a being who seeks truth, creates law, executes justice, and experiences its consequences.

The core philosophical idea of the presented work is that justice is not merely a legal norm, but a moral and ethical responsibility of man. For justice to exist, law must be accompanied by knowledge, truth, conscience, objectivity, and compassion. The symbolic language of the work prompts the viewer to establish connections among these concepts and to reflect upon the essence of justice.

In this regard, the composition can be evaluated not only as an artistic work depicting justice, but also as a visual text of a philosophical nature presenting a moral model of a just society. The integrity of the symbols in the work demonstrates that justice requires balance like a scale, knowledge like a book, responsibility like a sword, seeing the truth like an eye, and spiritual light like a sun. Through the harmony of these elements, the central idea of the work emerges: the concept of justice rooted in truth and protected by humanity and moral values.

The composition of the work is structured vertically. This allows the viewer's gaze to move from bottom to top and top to bottom, sequentially absorbing the various symbolic layers of the work. The long, sharp sword positioned at the center of the composition serves as the main axis unifying all visual elements.

The placement of the sword in the center of the composition is not accidental. In the visual structure of the work, it forms both the foundation of symmetry and the ideological core. The open book above the sword, the sun-like form resting upon it, and the human profiles divided between the scales below organize the semantic structure of the work in a stepped, layered manner.

An open book is depicted in the upper section of the composition. A decorative, ornamented form extending downward from the center of the book visually connects with the hilt of the sword. Thus, a spiritual connection is established between the book and the sword. Here, the book can express knowledge and truth, while the sword represents the power of law and justice.

The image of the golden sun located in the center of the composition is one of the brightest visual focal points of the work. The rays emanating from the sun impart dynamism to the composition and visually emphasize the central idea. The sun here can be interpreted as a symbol of light, truth, rightfulness, and spiritual awakening.

In the lower section of the work, the placement of two human profiles facing each other commands attention. Rendering the human faces in two distinct colors and textures can signify not only their physical difference, but also their contrasting worldviews and life stances. The sword positioned between these two profiles illustrates the boundary between them, as well as the principle that justice must be applied equally to both sides.

From this perspective, the overall structure of the composition shapes the following idea: people may be different, but everyone is equal before justice.

One of the most essential symbols of the work is the sword. The sword is a universal symbol in visual arts, carrying various meanings. On one hand, it can symbolize power, struggle, and defense; on the other, the enforcement of law and justice.

In this work, the shape and placement of the sword demonstrate that it carries a broader meaning than a mere weapon image. Positioned in the exact center of the composition, the sword unifies all elements of the work. Its tip points downward. This orientation highlights the legislative and regulatory function of the sword rather than a destructive one.

Particularly noteworthy is the depiction of the sword's hilt in the form of a human hand. Here, the human hand symbolizes willpower, responsibility, and the capacity for decision-making. The mere existence of law is insufficient for the execution of justice; the human will that protects and applies it is equally crucial.

In this regard, the integration of the sword with the human hand can be interpreted as follows: the fate of justice depends on human conscience, will, and responsibility.

One of the clearest and most universal symbols of the work is the scale. Historically, the scale has been considered one of the primary symbols of justice. Its core function is to measure, compare, and establish balance.

In the presented work, the scales are positioned on both sides of the composition. This placement reinforces the symmetrical structure of the artwork. However, the various imagery placed upon the scales adds further semantic depth to the piece.

The placement of the eye image on the left scale expresses the idea of observation, oversight, and witnessing the truth. Here, the eye is not merely an organ of physical vision, but also a symbol of moral and philosophical perception. For justice, it is essential to see the truth, to comprehend the essence of events, and to uncover that which is hidden.

On the scale positioned on the right side, a red flower commands attention. The flower is traditionally a symbol of life, love, beauty, and hope. The color red, meanwhile, is associated with passion, vital energy, and at times, the concept of sacrifice. Thus, an intriguing semantic juxtaposition emerges between one scale bearing an eye and the other bearing a flower.

Together, these two symbols can represent the balance between truth and humanity, law and mercy, objectivity and emotion. Justice must be complemented not only by strict law, but also by human moral values. In this sense, the artwork presents the concept of justice not solely within a legal framework, but also from an ethical and humanistic perspective.

The eye imagery in the work is one of the ancient and universal symbols. Across various cultures, the eye has been associated with divine oversight, wisdom, truth, consciousness, and spiritual awakening.

Positioning the eye on one pan of the scale in the composition enhances its specific semantic significance. Here, the eye can express the idea that justice sees all. Through this symbol, the thought is conveyed that no event, no injustice, and no truth remains hidden. The eye can also symbolize a person's inner vision. In this case, the artwork invites the viewer to look not only at the external world, but also into their own inner realm. When reflecting upon justice, a person must first be just within themselves.

The open book placed in the upper section of the composition is one of the key symbolic elements of the work. Throughout history, the book has been regarded as a bearer of knowledge, science, memory, history, and truth.

The open state of the book in the work is particularly significant. Unlike a closed book, an open book symbolizes openness to knowledge, as well as the pursuit and acquisition of truth. The depiction of the golden sun located in the central part of the work is one of the strongest elements of the composition in terms of emotion and color.

As one of the most ancient symbols, the sun is associated with life, light, energy, and truth. Just as light makes the truth visible in the face of darkness, justice reveals the hidden inequities within society. The placement of the sun behind the sword creates a particularly interesting compositional solution. In this arrangement, the sword is associated not merely with rigidity and force, but also with light—that is, with truth. The radiating of golden rays in various directions can symbolize the dissemination of justice and truth throughout all spheres of society. The color scheme of the work plays a vital role in shaping its symbolic content. The composition utilizes white, golden-yellow, green, blue, red, and brown tones.

White mainly dominates the book and certain parts of the background. The color white expresses purity, cleanliness, truth, and spiritual clarity. Rendering the open book with white surfaces reinforces its perception as a source of truth and knowledge.

The "gold and yellow" colors manifest themselves in the depiction of the sun. These colors are associated with light, energy, intellect, spiritual elevation, and hope. The golden tones of the sun visually emphasize the central idea of the composition.

The color "green" is utilized in the human profile on the right side and in the plant-like decorative element. Green is a symbol of nature, life, renewal, and development. This color adds a humanistic and life-affirming nuance to the rigorous legal and philosophical theme of the artwork.

The color "blue" creates a sense of tranquility, contemplation, stability, and spiritual depth. The blue tones in the lower section of the work soften the emotional tension of the composition and impart a calm, reflective atmosphere to it.

The color "red" is primarily used in the image of the flower. Although it covers a small area within the composition, it possesses strong emotional impact. The red flower acts as a symbol of life, love, and human emotions. Within the coloristic structure of the work, golden light, white truth, green life, blue contemplation, and red emotion interact with one another to form a unified semantic system. The two human profiles placed facing each other in the lower section of the work constitute one of the most intriguing semantic elements of the composition. One of the human faces is rendered in warmer tones, while the other is depicted in cooler colors.

Juxtaposing these two profiles can express the dual nature of humanity—its rational and emotional, individual and social, material and spiritual dimensions.

The sword positioned between the human profiles serves as both a boundary and a balancing element between these two worlds. Thus, the central position of the sword demonstrates that justice is the primary regulatory force in human relations.

Here, the placement of two people facing each other also creates the idea of dialogue. Justice is not merely delivering a judgment, but also the ability to listen to the opposing side, to understand, and to arrive at an objective decision.

Analyzing all the symbols of the work together reveals a unified semantic system. The book expresses knowledge and truth, the sword law and power, the scale justice and balance, the eye the observation of truth, the sun light and spiritual clarity, and the flower humanity and compassion. The interaction of these symbols shapes the core philosophical idea of the work: Justice must be built upon truth and knowledge, while force and law must be balanced with humanity and compassion. In the work, justice is not presented as the dominance of one side over another. On the contrary, the concept of balance is brought to the fore through the symbol of the scale. This balance must be established between individual and society, law and mercy, reason and emotion, power and responsibility.

The presented work is an example of a multi-layered composition that commands attention through its symbolic and philosophical content. Although the central idea of the work takes shape around the concept of justice, this concept acquires a broader meaning through diverse symbols such as the book, sword, scale, eye, sun, human, and flower. Located at the center of the composition, the sword forms the main ideological axis of the work and interconnects the other symbols. The unity of the book and the sword becomes a symbol of knowledge and power, while the scales symbolize justice and balance. The eye represents seeing the truth, the sun spiritual light, and the flower humanity and mercy. The most vital feature of the work is that justice is presented here not merely as a legal category, but as a moral and philosophical responsibility of man. The symbolic use of colors, vertical composition, construction of the central axis, and integration of various symbols around a unified idea reinforce the artistic expressiveness of the work.

The work does not merely ask the viewer, "What is justice?", but also poses a deeper question: "What values must a person possess within themselves to preserve justice?" In this regard, the piece presents the unity of truth, knowledge, responsibility, conscience, and compassion as the essential prerequisite for a just society.

The potential title of the work—"Rays of Justice" (or "Dawn of Justice")—further complements this idea. Here, "ray/dawn" symbolizes the transition from darkness to light, as well as the birth of truth and justice. Thus, the work as a whole poetically and symbolically expresses the idea of justice breaking through the darkness to generate a new spiritual light for humanity and society.

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